

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

Local legend whispered that this was the final resting place of Alice Nutter, St. Mary's Church, Newchurch in Pendle.

In the quaint village of Newchurch in Pendle, stood St. Mary's Church, an ancient structure that had become an integral part of the community. With its towering presence at the centre of the village, it commanded attention and held within it a rich history.

The church's oldest part was its tower, dating back to 1544. Perched atop the tower was a peculiar sight—a curious "eye of God," an elliptic shape believed to watch over the village. The eye had been installed years after the infamous execution of the witches, serving as a symbolic ward against evil spirits that may still lingered. The main body of the church had been constructed in the seventeenth century, adding to the architectural tapestry of the village.

Within the church grounds, situated to the east of the porch and against the south wall, lay the grave of a member of the Nutter family. The stone that marked the grave was intricately carved with a skull and crossbones, evoking a sense of mortality. Local legend whispered that this was the final resting place of Alice Nutter, a gentlewoman from nearby Roughlee Hall who had met her tragic end as one of the Pendle Witches in 1612. However, it was uncommon for executed witches to receive a Christian burial in consecrated ground. The skull and crossbones on the stone served as a memento mori, a somber reminder to onlookers of their own mortality.

The Demdikes, a family led by Elizabeth Southernns, known as Old Demdike, played a central role in the story of the Pendle witches. Living in Newchurch in Pendle during the seventeenth century, the Demdikes were one of the accused families. The tale of the Pendle witches revolved around these two destitute families—the Chattoxes and the Demdikes—who were believed to possess an affinity for black magic, capitalizing on their local reputation.

Centuries ago, the village was known as "Goldshaw Booth," with the term "booth" originating from the Norse word "but," meaning dwelling place. However, as time passed, the name transformed into "Newchurch in Pendle Forest." Eventually, to simplify and reflect its close ties with the Pendle region, it became known as "Newchurch in Pendle."

In this picturesque village, nestled in the rolling hills and surrounded by the enchanting Pendle Forest, the echoes of history could still be heard. St. Mary's Church stood as a testament to the stories woven through time, from the watchful eye of God guarding the villagers to the tales of witches and their mysterious presence. Newchurch in Pendle held its secrets close, inviting visitors to delve into its past and discover the enchantment that lingered in its ancient streets.

By Donald Jay